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The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art

PERSIAN PAINTING
of the Fifteenth Century

with an introduction and notes by

R. H. PINDER-WILSON

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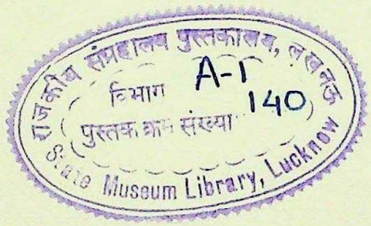

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Introduction by R. H. Pinder-Wilson

The fifteenth century in Persia has come to be associated with the Timurid Renaissance. In general it was a period of oppression and political insecurity. The Persians themselves were more often than not the victims or at best spectators of rivalries between foreign adventurers. The ravages caused by the invasions of Timur "Scourge of God", the constant strife that attended the maintenance of Timurid power and the contest of rival Turkman clans to win the crown of Persia were unable to quench their artistic genius.

The crucial factor in the cultural life of the period was the patron on whom both artist and writer depended; and more than one prince of the house of Timur filled this role superlatively well. In most cases the demand for the external refinements of civilisation was dictated by a desire for personal prestige and it is seldom possible to determine the exact extent of the influence exerted by the prince on the work of his protegés. Timur and his successor Shah Rukh embellished the cities of Samarqand and Herat with all the resources at their disposal. Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg, was a devotee of astronomy, founded an observatory which came to be regarded as one of the wonders of the world and supervised the revision of Ptolemy's astronomical tables—a work which embraced the astronomical knowledge of the age and won fame in Europe. To his brother Baysunghar the world owes some of the most splendid books ever produced: and the enlightened patronage of Sultan Husain Mirza, the last great Timurid, and his court at Herat calls to mind his contemporary, Lorenzo "Il Magnifico" and the city of Florence.

There is no better way of judging the Timurid achievement than in the field of book production. The number of surviving manuscripts together with the miniatures which adorn them increases as the century progresses. Thanks to Timurid patronage a perfectly integrated style of painting was allowed to grow and develop. Its essential features were inherited by the artists of the Safavid period and its influence was felt far beyond the political confines of Persia.

The great books of the period were the fruit of an elaborate and costly library organisation requiring the combined efforts of painter, calligrapher, illuminator and binder. Contemporary and later historians record the names of artists but with rare exceptions their work cannot be identified. There is no reason however to assume that convention and a rigid apprentice organisation stifled personal expression or excluded innovation. The frontispiece of a famous manuscript of the Shah Nameh copied for Baysunghar depicts the young prince mounted on his horse and attended by his court—probably the earliest surviving essay in portraiture. The choice and treatment of everyday scenes by Bihzad and his circle are as unexpected as they are remarkable. The subject matter—incidents from epic, romance, history and fable—was inevitably circumscribed, but apart from mere copyists, painters achieved a surprising variety of treatment within the iconographic convention. It is important to distinguish between the products of the great metropolitan centres and those of more modest provincial ateliers. The efforts of less accomplished painters to emulate the work of the imperial establishments sometimes led to the formation of a local style. Broadly speaking two distinct styles developed in Timurid Persia; the one associated with Herat and the other with Shiraz. At the same time the conception of schools of painting each with a fixed geographical centre should not be pressed too far since there was a constant movement of artists, whether voluntary or enforced, so that two or more styles may occur side by side in a single manuscript.

There are no manuscript miniatures which can be associated with Timur himself. This is surprising because he spent the last ten years of his life adorning his city of Samarqand with palaces, mosques, madrasas and funerary monuments destined for members of the imperial family and the court. Artists and craftsmen were brought to the capital from the subjugated cities, Tabriz, Baghdad, Isfahan and Shiraz. Among these were three artists who had already established their reputations as miniaturists at the court of the Jalairid Sultans in Baghdad. One of them, Junaid, was responsible for at least one of the miniatures in a manuscript of the poems of Khwaju of Kirman copied at Baghdad in 1396. Another was Junaid's master Abd ul-Hayy who was entrusted with the execution of the mural decorations for the imperial palaces in Samarqand. According to Timur's historian and biographer Ibn Arabshah these were intended to memorialise the great events of the conqueror's career—military victories, the emperor receiving the submission of the vanquished and portraits of the imperial family. From the few surviving fragments it is hardly possible to form any clear idea of the style in which these were executed. Probably this extensive programme of mural decoration allowed little time for the practice of miniature painting: and neither contemporary nor later historians make any mention of an organised library in the imperial capital at this date.

Timur's death in 1405 was the signal for the subject rulers to regain their independence. One of these was the Jalairid prince Sultan Ahmad who now re-established himself in Mesopotamia. His tenure was brief for in 1409 he and his son fell fighting against his one-time vassal Qara Yusuf, leader of the Black Sheep Turkman. Possessed of the former Jalairid domains the sons and successors of Qara Yusuf succeeded in extending their power over the whole

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Plate 1. *Iskandar Visits a Hermit.* (See page 24)

of western and southern Persia until they in their turn were eclipsed by their rivals the White Sheep Turkman.

Persia and Transoxiana became a prey to the rapacious quarrels between the sons and grandsons of Timur. The total extinction of the empire was arrested by Timur's fourth son Shah Rukh. He embarked on the reconquest of the empire province by province and finally established his sovereignty with the occupation of Azerbaijan in 1420. He ruled until his death in 1447 and to judge from contemporary accounts appears to have been of an amiable disposition and intent on repairing the ravages of his father.

The first prince of the Timurid house to patronise the miniature appears to have been Timur's grandson, Iskandar ibn Umar Shaikh. On his grandfather's death, Iskandar acknowledged the sovereignty of his uncle Shah Rukh who rewarded him with the governorship of Yezd. In 1410–11 his elder brother was murdered and Iskandar secured the succession to the governorship of Shiraz. Within two years he was declaring his independence of the emperor who finally crushed his unruly nephew and had him executed in 1415. The career of this prince gives some indication of the general instability of these years; personal advancement was the mainspring of his actions and to this end allegiances were made and discarded with a cynical indifference. An opportunist he certainly was; at the same time he proved himself a friend to learning, was the author or more probably the inspirer of a religious book and was converted to Shiism. Such glaring contradictions are met with in more than one prince of his house.

Among the manuscripts made for Iskandar is an anthology

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of poetry and prose copied in 1410–11. Its miniatures are a worthy prelude to Timurid painting which they adumbrate in all essentials; a harmoniously balanced composition, a satisfactory relationship between the protagonists and their setting, a meticulous attention to detail and the indication of space by the upward extension of the horizon. Although they were executed in Shiraz they do not reflect the style of painting current in that city on the eve of the Timurid invasion; but are rather connected with the school of painting that had developed at the Jalairid court in Baghdad towards the close of the preceding century. The few surviving examples of this school vary in quality and to some extent in style; but the manuscript of the poems of Khwaju of Kirman now preserved in the British Museum is an acknowledged masterpiece as well as a landmark in the history of Persian painting.[1] We have already had occasion to mention the artist Junaid who signed one of its nine miniatures and whose hand can be detected in several of the others. Nearly a century's experimenting contributed to the creation of the style which reached maturity in these paintings—a style that for all its self-assurance retains the vitality of youth. Most remarkable is how it foreshadows all later developments. The Jalairid artist had already solved to his own and to his Timurid successor's satisfaction the problem of space relationship and established the principal conventions of the Persian miniature.

The Timurid princes recruited their artists from the courts of the conquered rulers; but not all were destined exclusively for Samarqand. Iskandar himself is said to have married the daughter of Sultan Ahmad Jalair and is therefore likely to have come in contact with the artistic circle of his father-in-law. This may have been one reason for his choice of Jalairid rather than local artists of Shiraz who, as we shall see, were trained in a different tradition.

With Iskandar's death in 1415, artistic hegemony passed to the court of Herat where his cousin Baysunghar son of Shah Rukh had been appointed governor in the previous year at the early age of fifteen. Himself a poet and calligrapher he gathered around him poets and men of letters and established a library where according to one historian forty calligraphers were employed. Baysunghar's greatest title to fame is the recension of Firdausi's Shah Nameh or Book of the Kings which was carried out at his orders in 1426 and to which he had a poem prefixed in his own name. One outcome of this undertaking was the great copy of the Shah Nameh now preserved in the Gulistan Library, Teheran. Completed in 1430 this masterpiece of book production represents the peak of the Herat Academy's development, for two years later Baysunghar died prematurely of an excessive addiction to wine. By their combined efforts miniaturist and illuminator have here produced a wonderful display of virtuosity. The relationship between the style of its miniatures and that of the Jalairid miniatures is close enough to warrant the assumption that Baysunghar's artists included some who had previously worked for Iskandar at Shiraz.

Baysunghar's library passed to his son Ala ud-Daula who kept it in being until his uncle Ulugh Beg carried off both library and staff to Samarqand in 1447. Under the patronage of Ala ud-Daula at least one manuscript was produced that can compare in quality of conception and execution to those of his father. The Royal Asiatic Society of London possesses a copy of the Shah Nameh dating from about 1440. Compared with the miniatures of Baysunghar's Shah Nameh, the drawing is looser and the tones more subdued; pages are less densely "peopled" and figures are more reduced in scale. Some of the compositions such as that of "Farud slaying Zarasp" (plate 4) are strikingly original and the feeling of poetry and romance that pervades the "Meeting of poets in a garden" (plate 3) could only have been achieved by an artist of considerable power of expression.

Another of Shah Rukh's sons, Ibrahim, was appointed to succeed Iskandar at Shiraz which he governed until his death in 1435–6. Like his brother Baysunghar with whom he carried on a literary correspondence, he patronised learning and the arts and is said to have studied the art of illumination. We do not know whether he inherited his predecessor's library; and it has already been suggested that some at least of Iskandar's artists found their way to Baysunghar's court at Herat. Shiraz, however was certainly not denuded of its artists for in 1420 an anthology of Persian poetry now in the State Museum, Berlin, was prepared for Baysunghar possibly at the order of his brother Ibrahim. The miniatures of this manuscript are an indication of the kind of painting in vogue under Ibrahim. This seems to have been a partial restoration of the style already established at Shiraz in the previous century.

In the fourteenth century painting at Shiraz had remained independent of the metropolitan school that had developed at Tabriz and Baghdad under the patronage of the Mongol Il Khanids and their successors. Influence was limited to external details such as costume and decorative motives. The Shirazi artist was less sensitive to tonal values and his handling was broad and summary. He preferred symmetrical compositions and reduced his figures to the main protagonists excluding all superfluous detail. In order to indicate depth he sometimes arranged rocks and hills in transverse lanes or valleys among which figures appear to move on different planes. Elsewhere he adopted a high semi-circular horizon.

By far the most impressive of the manuscripts made for Ibrahim Sultan is a copy of the Shah Nameh now in the Bodleian Library. The style of its miniatures is quite distinct from that of Baysunghar's Shah Nameh with which they are almost contemporary. Here the approach is direct and the treatment broad and vigorous. The eye is not distracted by excessive detail but is allowed to concentrate

[1]See Douglas Barrett: "*Persian Painting of the Fourteenth Century.*" (Faber Gallery of Oriental Art) plates 8–9

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on the main action. A certain stiffness in the drawing detracts neither from the verve of the heroic episodes nor from the tenderness of the love scenes. The feeling of harmony and tranquillity that surrounds the rustic court of Gayumars is achieved with an extraordinary economy of means.

In 1467 Shiraz was incorporated in the kingdom of the White Sheep Turkman until the last of the dynasty surrendered it to the Safavid Shah Isma'il in 1503. These political vicissitudes do not seem to have impaired the artistic life of the city. From the death of Ibrahim Sultan, manuscripts survive in ever-increasing numbers. The style current under Ibrahim underwent certain modifications; an increased interest in rendering nature produced greater invention in depicting flowers and vegetation. The new type of figure evolved is short and sturdy with slightly overlarge head; and the rendering of facial features becomes mannered and stereotyped. Generally the drawing is hard and finished.

In 1486 several artists combined in producing a profusely illustrated Shah Nameh now in the British Museum. In these miniatures, the new elements have been absorbed in a self-assured style. Particularly striking is an exotic vein in a group represented here by the "Fight between Raksh and the lion" (plate 6) with its strident juxtaposition of reds, swirling clouds lined with violet, and overgrown flowers.

The loss of Shiraz was one of the many reverses which the Timurid empire had to suffer on the death of Shah Rukh. Its fortunes were partially retrieved by Abu Sa'id, another grandson of Timur; but after a reign of ten years he was destroyed by the White Sheep Turkman. Henceforward Timurid power was confined to Turkestan, contested by the sons of Abu Sa'id, and Khurasan, ruled from 1468 to 1506 by Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara, a descendant of Umar Shaikh.

Sultan Husain Mirza's reign of nearly forty years provides a worthy epilogue to the Timurid period in Persia. Hard pressed by the Uzbeks in the east, his kingdom could play no considerable political role; but the literary and artistic life of Herat had an enduring influence on the cultural history of Persia. An intrepid soldier, Sultan Husain Mirza was also a poet and bibliophile. Together with his famous minister Mir Ali Shir Neva'i, himself a distinguished writer, he extended his protection to poets, writers, artists and calligraphers.

Both sovereign and minister possessed their own library establishments and the names of some of their artists are recorded. A few of the Herat paintings of this period are not far removed in style from those of the previous generation. Others, however, are so different that they seem to indicate a change in outlook. The most inspired are the work of Bihzad and it is likely therefore that he was the principal influence in this movement.

Bihzad is the subject of eulogies by his contemporaries and later writers as well as by connoisseurs like the Mughal Emperors Babur and Jahangir. His fame is also attested by several paintings of a later date which are expressly stated to be copies after Bihzad. A great many more bear ascriptions to Bihzad or his counterfeited signature.

Many of the details of his life and work elude us. But the main course of his career at least is provided by allusions in literature and by the evidence of his miniatures. He was probably born between 1450 and 1460. His parents died when he was quite young and he was adopted by the painter Mirak, later to become director of Sultan Husain Mirza's library. For some time he was employed in the library of Mir Ali Shir but subsequently joined the staff of the royal library, probably on the recommendation of his guardian and teacher Mirak.

When Herat fell to the Uzbeks in 1507, Bihzad was obliged to remain there in the employ of Shaibani Khan, the new lord of Khurasan. Three years later the city was captured by Shah Isma'il and he entered the service of the young king in his capital of Tabriz. There he must soon have won his new master's esteem for in 1522 he was appointed director of the Imperial library. He may still have held this office at the time of his death in 1536.

In 1488–9 Bihzad painted the miniatures in a manuscript of Sa'di's Bustan copied for Sultan Husain Mirza and now preserved in the Egyptian Library, Cairo. These six paintings have served as the basis for attributing to the master a number of miniatures executed between 1485 and 1495 or a few years later. What survives of his work thus represents a mere decade of his long and, we are to assume, productive career. It is of course true that during these years he must have been the undisputed leader of the Herat school. Yet it is our misfortune that none of his work executed at the Safavid court of Tabriz can be identified with any certainty in spite of the fact that he was a potent influence on the younger generation of painters.

Bihzad made no radical innovations but accepted the conventions and methods of his predecessors. What distinguishes him from them is his consummate skill in drawing which gave him a wonderful manipulative power over his figures both human and animal and which enabled him to indicate space relationship to a degree unknown before or after. His pictures are composed with a nice precision and every unit of line and colour plays an essential part in the whole. In his rendering of people and animals he introduced a naturalism based on careful observation; and he replaced the pasteboard figures of earlier artists with individual types characterised by posture and gesture if not by facial expression. His vision was unimpaired by the diminutive compass of the miniature; and what might seem a serious limitation could be turned to positive advantage. Into the tiny area of the miniature on plate 7 he has effectively distilled the turmoil of battle.

He is as much at home in the mundane as in the heroic scene and possessed the "painter's eye" more than any other

[*continued on page 24*

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Plate 2

ISKANDAR AND THE SIRENS

A page (folio 286) from the same manuscript as plate 1

Size: 6 in. × $3\frac{7}{8}$ in.

British Museum (Add. 27,261)

Alexander's adventures as sage and prophet are described in the Iqbal Nameh. After crossing the Eastern Sea, he came to an inland lake where he saw and heard the "brides of the water" who come to the surface at night and cause men to lose their reason by the sweetness of their singing.

Here as elsewhere in these miniatures water was originally portrayed in silver which in the course of time has become oxidized. This accounts for the rather over-emphatic dark tone of this area.

Many of the miniatures executed by Iskandar's artists served as models for their contemporaries and successors who made versions exact or free according to the degree of their artistic inventiveness. The artist who contributed a version of "Iskandar and the Sirens"[1] to a manuscript of Nizami's Khamsa, copied probably for Shah Rukh about the same time as Iskandar's manuscript, must have seen the miniature reproduced opposite. There is yet another version —at one or more stages removed—in a manuscript of the Khamsa copied for Shah Rukh in 1431 and now preserved in the Public Library, Leningrad.

[1] Reproduced by Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1933, (plate xxxii).

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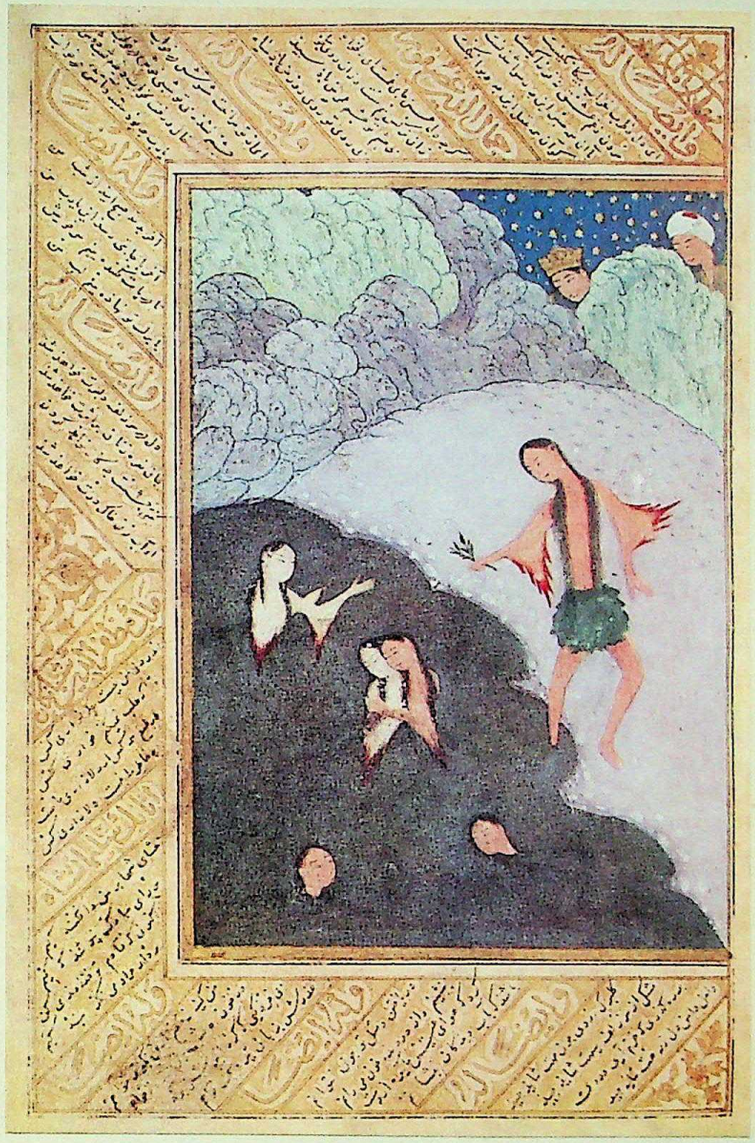

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Plate 3

POETS CONVERSING IN A GARDEN

A page (folio 7) from a manuscript of the Shah Nameh about 1440 A.D.

Size: 7 in. × 6 in.

Royal Asiatic Society, London (Ms. no. 239)

The preface to the great epic relates how the poet Firdausi won the favour of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. On reaching Ghazna he entered a garden on the outskirts of the city where three eminent poets of the court were exchanging verses. In order to be accepted in their company he was made to prove his poetic skill and so impressed them that they presented him to the Sultan who commissioned him to compose the Shah Nameh.

The artist has succeeded in conveying an atmosphere of calm and content. The poets converse in the quiet of a garden set on a hill slope: sunlight and the fragrance of flowers, scudding clouds and a cooling stream. By breaking through the enclosing frame the hillside is given the illusion of being brought nearer to the eye.

The colophon of the manuscript is lacking. The name Muhammad Juki is inscribed on a banner in one of the miniatures. This was probably Mirza Muhammad Juki, brother of Baysunghar who died in 1444–1445. Subsequently the manuscript passed into the possession of the Mughal emperors.

All the thirty-two miniatures of the manuscript have been reproduced.[1]

[1] Twenty-three are reproduced in *The Shah-Namah*, described by J. V. S. Wilkinson, London, 1931; and the remainder by B. W. Robinson, *Unpublished paintings from a XVth century "Book of Kings"*, in Apollo Miscellany, London, 1951, pp. 17-23.

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Plate 4

FARUD SLAYS ZARASP

A page (folio 119 verso) from the same manuscript as plate 3

Size $8\frac{3}{8}$ in. × $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

From the heights of Mount Sapad, the young prince Farud contested the passage of the Iranian armies. When the turn came for Zarasp to scale the mountain slope, Farud pinned him to his saddle with a single bolt.

This powerful scene is a fine example of the way in which the Herat artist depicted the incidents of a battle. The concentration of the action is along a diagonal axis emphasised by the "steps" of the text area. With a sound instinct for the dramatic, the artist has chosen the moment of sudden arrest by the archer's arrow. The feeling of suspense is heightened by the motionless row of helmeted spectators and the group of horsemen: a horse whinnies and a rider bites his finger—the Persian gesture of astonishment.

The greater part of Firdausi's epic is devoted to the bitter war waged between the Iranians and Turanians—those who dwell within and without the eastern confines of the Iranian plateau.

Farud, scion of the royal house of Iran but born of a Turanian mother, held lands in the name of Afrasyab, king of Turan. The armies of the Iranian king Kai Khusrau disobeyed their sovereign's injunction to refrain from passing through his stepbrother's territory and Farud's heroic stand ended in his death at the hands of his countrymen.

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Plate 5

GAYUMARS THE FIRST KING

A page (folio 20) from a manuscript of the Shah Nameh copied for Ibrahim Sultan ibn Shah Rukh.

About 1430

Size: 10 in. × 6 in.

Bodleian Library (Ouseley Add. 176)

According to Persian tradition the first man to wear the crown was Gayumars who dwelt on a mountain with his followers. Even the wild beasts acknowledged his sovereignty. This age of peace and innocence is skilfully evoked by the use of gentle curves and cool tones; unnecessary elaboration of detail is avoided.

The forty-seven miniatures of this manuscript vary in quality as well as in style. One group, however, reveals the extent to which the Shirazi artists had succeeded in evolving a style appropriate to the epic narrative. This was already well advanced in the Anthology copied for Baysunghar at his brother Ibrahim's orders in 1420 and now in the State Museum, Berlin; while its affinities with the Muzaffarid manuscripts of the end of the previous century are clear enough. It is hard to explain on our present evidence the apparent inactivity of the Shirazi artists for some twenty years—unless it was Iskandar's preference for Jalairid artists.

This manuscript of the Shah Nameh contains a poem in praise of Ibrahim and Baysunghar's preface of 1426. It must therefore have been produced between 1426 and 1436.

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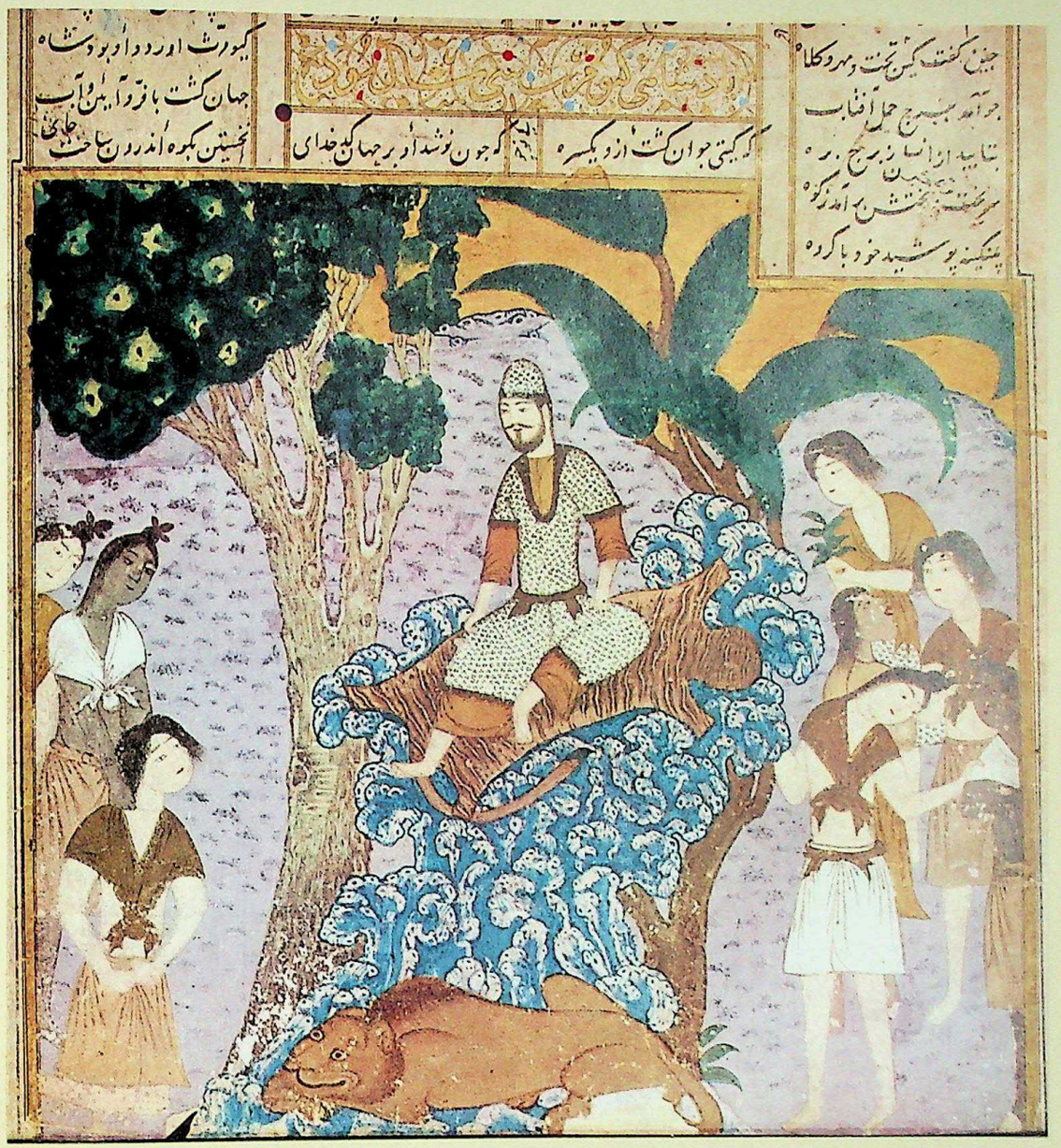

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Plate 6

RAKHSH FIGHTS A LION WHILE RUSTAM SLEEPS

A page (folio 90 verso) from a manuscript of the Shah Nameh copied by Ghiyath ud-Din ibn Bayazid Sarraf in A.H. 891; 1486 A.D.

Size: 9 in. × 6 in.

British Museum (Add. 18, 188)

His horse Rakhsh, spotted roan "like roses spread upon a ground of saffron", accompanied the paladin Rustam on all his exploits. Kai Kaus was held captive by the Divs of Mazanderan. In order to rescue him Rustam had to undergo seven courses. The first is illustrated in this miniature. At the close of the first day's journeying, Rustam settled down to sleep in a bed of reeds after turning his horse loose in a meadow. A lion made to attack Rustam from its lair in the reeds but Rakhsh fought and killed it.

The artist carefully follows the poet's description: the piebald horse, the reed bed and the panther skin and leopard-head helmet of Rustam. The subject is reduced to its simplest terms. The figure of Rustam has been included almost as an afterthought, the artist having left him unsupported in mid air. His originality lies in his strident palette and exuberant manner of delineating clouds and flowers; but in all essentials he is in the main stream of the Shirazi tradition as it developed after the death of Ibrahim Sultan. Its two principal features—a more studied rendering of nature and a new canon of the human form was already established by the middle of the century. Painting at Shiraz seems to have been unaffected by the experiments taking place at about the same time in Herat and the style persisted into the following century.

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کمند کیانی بینداخت شیر
بحلقه درآورد گورد دلیر

کمند و تک رخش و رستم سوار
نیابند زو دام و دد زینهار

ز پیکان تیر آتشی بر فروخت
بر و خار و خاشاک چندی بسوخت

بران آتش تیر بر پایش کرد
ازان پس که بی پوست پایش کرد

بخورد و بینداخت او را بخوان
همین بود خورد و همین بود خان

لگام از سر رخش بگذاشت خوار
جوانش چو بگذاشت بر مرغزار

یکی نیستان بستر خواب داشت
اریم را جای ایمن شناخت

دران نیستان بیشه شیر بود
که سیلی نیارست ازان پی درود

چو یک پاس بگذشت درنده شیر
بپیش کنام خود آمد دلیر

جنگ رخش با شیر و کشته شدن شیر

یکی بر یکی بیطلب حمله دید
براو یکی رخش آشفته دید

نخست آب را گفت بایست کیست
چو خواهم خود آید سوارم بدست

سوی رخش رخشان بیامد دمان
جوانش بجوشید رخش آن زمان

دو دست اندر آورد و زد بر سرش
همان تیر دندان بپست اندرش

همی زدش بر خاک تا پاره کرد
دوی را بدان جای بیچاره کرد

چو بیدار شد رستم شیر جنگ
جهان دید بر شیر تاریک و تنگ

چنین گفت کای رخش با هوشیار
که گفتت که با شیر کن کارزار

اگر تو شدی کشته در جنگ اوی
من این بیر و این مغفر جنگ جوی

چگونه کشیدی بجا زندران
کمند و کمان تیر و گرز گران

مرم گر ز خواب خوش آگه شدی
ترا جنگ با شیر کوته شدی

چو خورشید برزد سر از تیره کوه
تهمتن ز خواب خوش آمد بپوش

تن رخش بیچید و زین برنهاد
زیزدان نیکی دهش کرد یاد

یکی راه پیش آمدش ناگزیر
همی رفت بایست بر خیر خیر

بی آب و گویا زبان سوار
ز گرمی و ز تشنگی شد نگار

پیاده شد از اسب زو پیش بست
همی رفت ماران بکردار دست

همی رفت با چار پا چستی
سوی آسمان کرد روی سیاه

چنین گفت کای داور دادگر
همه رنج و سختی تو آری بسر

گر آید و تک خشنودی از دریغ من
بدان گیتی آگنده شد گنج من

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Plate 7

NAUFAL ENGAGES IN BATTLE WITH THE TRIBE OF LAILA

A page (folio 121 verso) from a manuscript of the Khamsa of Nizami copied in A.H. 846: 1442–1443 A.D.

By Bihzad

About 1493

Size: $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. × $3\frac{1}{2}$ in.

British Museum (Add. 25,900)

One of the five poems which make up Nizami's Khamsa recounts the loves of Laila and Majnun. Laila's father had refused to sanction their marriage and Majnun in his despair had sought solace in the desert. There he was befriended by Naufal, an Arab chieftain who at once espoused his friend's cause and went out with his followers to secure Laila by force.

Mobility is obtained by means of the circular arrangement and the vigorous movements of camels and riders. The figure of Majnun isolated against the horizon adds poignancy to the scene. Helplessly he watches the contest knowing that to him the issue can only bring disaster.

Only one of its nineteen miniatures (folio 41) is contemporary with the manuscript. Of the remainder, one (folio 77 verso) bears an inscription stating that it was painted in A.H. 898: 1493 A.D. Three including that reproduced here are signed between the columns of text by Bihzad.

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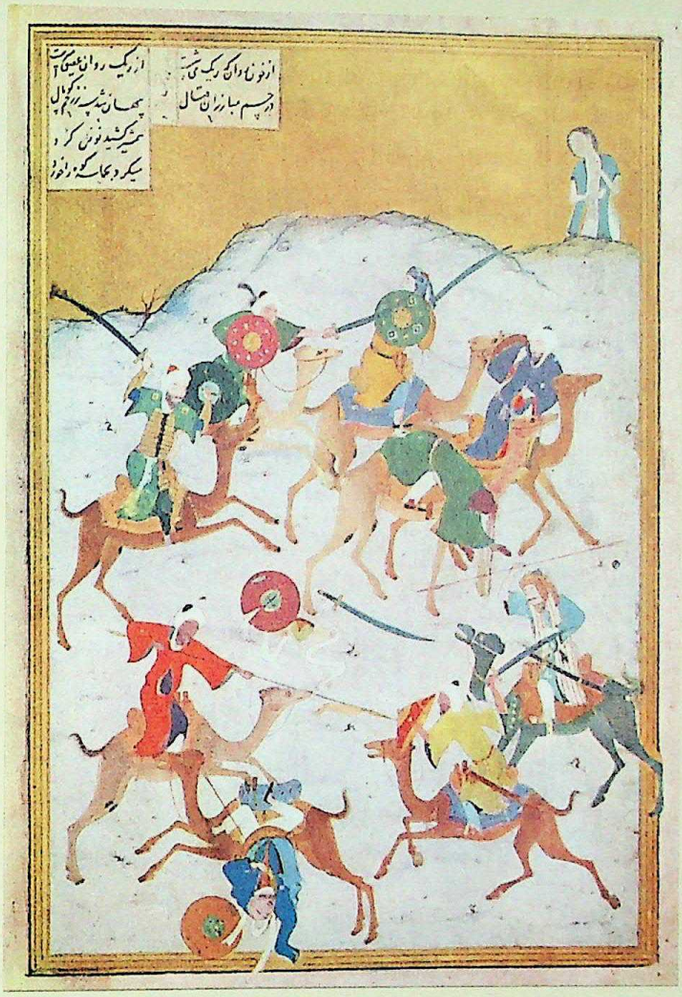

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Plate 8

HARUN UR-RASHID AND THE BARBER

A page (folio 27 verso) from a manuscript of the Khamsa of Nizami copied for Amir Farsi Barlas

By Bihzad

About 1495

Size: 7 in. × 6 in.

British Museum (Or. 6810)

One night the caliph Harun ur-Rashid visited the baths where he was astonished to hear the barber demanding his daughter in marriage. On his minister's advice, the servants dug beneath the spot where the barber stood while uttering his insolent demand and found treasure buried there. "Whoever steps upon treasure reveals the treasure when he speaks."

Two chambers of the bath-house are shown in section; an outer room where the caliph's garments and crown are arranged on the dais and an inner room where the caliph sits attended by the barber and youths.

The manuscript is undated but in the miniature on folio 214 the date A.H. 900: 1494–5 A.D. appears in an inscription on the lintel of a window. The names of the artists Mirak, Abd ur-Razzaq and Bihzad are inscribed singly or in pairs on nineteen of the twenty-two miniatures. The miniature reproduced here bears the names of Bihzad and Mirak. These are attributions made at a subsequent date. In 1564–5 the manuscript was in Agra and later found its way into the imperial library. There are autograph notes by Jahangir and Shah Jahan as well as the latter's seal. Jahangir who prided himself on his connoisseurship attributes in his note sixteen of the paintings to Bihzad, five to Mirak and one to Abd ur-Razzaq. Five of the miniatures do in fact have an old-fashioned appearance and may be the work of Bihzad's master: fourteen are either by Bihzad himself or executed under his direction. The miniatures reproduced on plates 8 and 9 have all the marks of Bihzad's hand. Side by side then in this manuscript is the work of master and pupil. In seven miniatures the phrase "painted by Qasim Ali" is written between the columns of text. Jahangir makes no mention of Qasim Ali in his note and it is unlikely that he would have overlooked the "signature". These were probably added at a subsequent date. It should be noted, too, that the Arabic phrase contains an inexplicable orthographic error.

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Plate 9

MAJNUN DIES ON LAILA'S TOMB

A page (folio 144 verso) from the same manuscript as plate 8

By Bihzad

About 1495

Size: 7 in. × $5\frac{4}{5}$ in.

This scene of a Beduin camp brings down the curtain on the tragedy of the lovers who in death found the union that had been denied them in life. The jackal, lion, panther and gazelles—as lovingly portrayed as the domestic animals—gather about the demented creature whom they had once consoled in the desert. The homely details, the piping shepherd boy, the herdsman tending his goats, a woman milking a buffalo and another spinning are typical of Bihzad's naturalism. So too is the use of contrasting tones, the grey shades of the tents, the brown and blue garments of the shepherd boy and the red furred cap and green coat of the herdsman.

The miniature is ascribed to Bihzad in the margin.

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Plate 10

ISKANDAR ENTHRONED

A page (folio 17) from a manuscript of Mir Ali Shir's Sadd-i-Iskandar copied in A.H. 890: 1485 A.D. for Badi' uz-Zaman

Probably by Qasim Ali

Size: 7 in. × $4\frac{2}{3}$ in.

Bodleian Library (Elliot 339)

One of the four miniatures in this manuscript is inscribed in the column between the text "the servant Qasim Ali". This may well be intended as a signature. All four miniatures seem to be by the same hand.

Dr. Ivan Stchoukine (in *Les Peintures des Manuscrits Timurides*, Paris, 1954, p. 70) argues in favour of attributing the "signed" miniature to Bihzad on the grounds that three of the figures are reproduced in one of Bihzad's miniatures in the Cairo Bustan of 1488 and that it is highly improbable that the master would have copied the work of his pupil. His contention raises the interesting problem of workshop organisation in fifteenth-century Persia. There is evidence, however, that the miniaturists of Sultan Husain Mirza were not averse to copying figures from early Timurid manuscripts and in the case under discussion it is not impossible that Bihzad plagiarized his own earlier models.

A beggar noted for his wisdom whom Iskandar has wished to enthrone, declines and demonstrates the transience of earthly things by producing the bones of a king and a poor man.

The panel above the arch is inscribed in Arabic with a benediction on Prince Badi' uz-Zaman.

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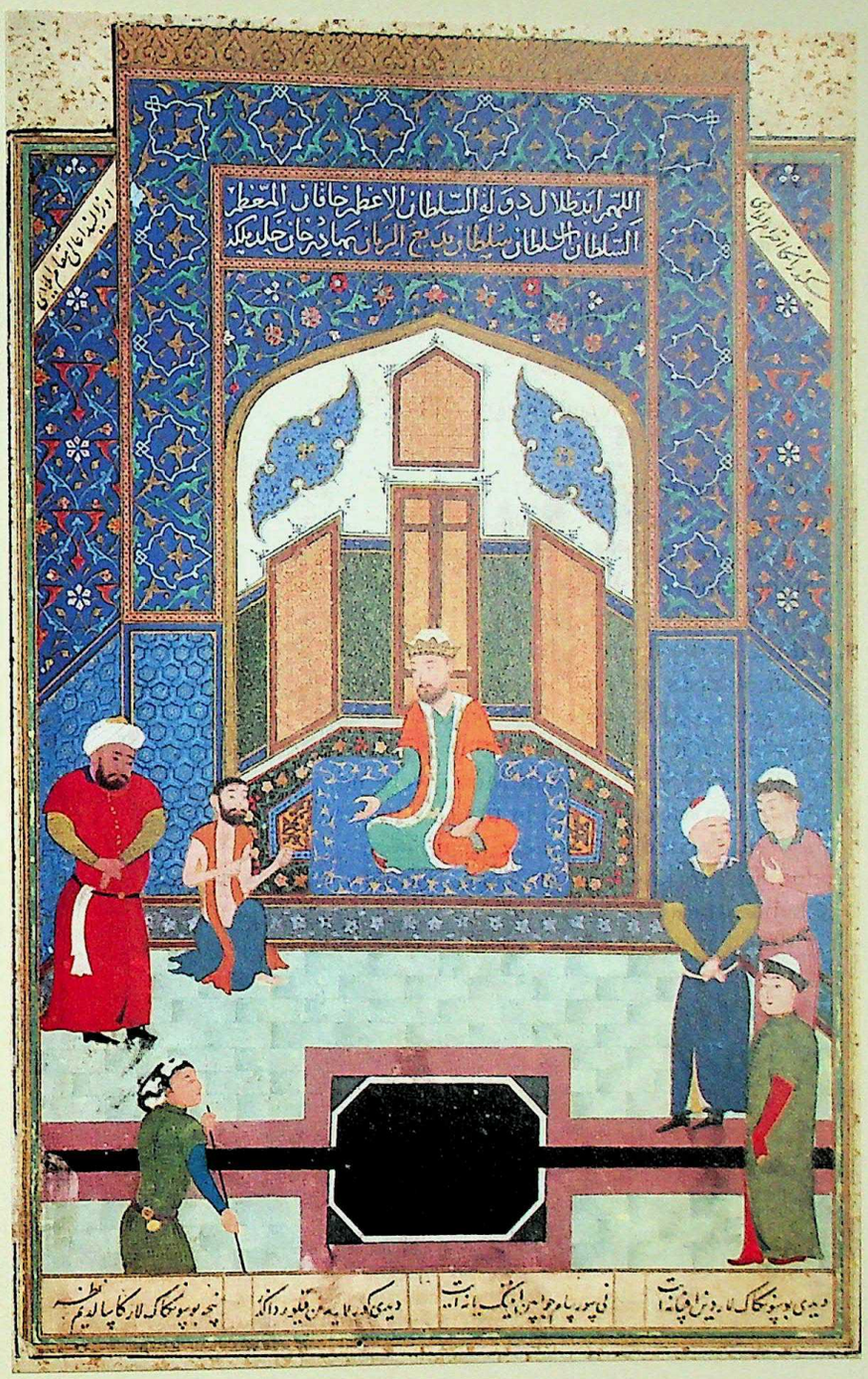

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continued from page 5]

Persian artist. He depicts the bustle of the bath-house and is sensitive to the chance pattern made by hanging towels and folded garments (plate 8). The episode of Majnun's death on the tomb of Laila (plate 9) is transformed by his brush into an exquisite pastoral idyll.

Among the other artists singled out for praise at the court of Sultan Husain Mirza is one of Bihzad's pupils Qasim Ali. He could not have been far removed in age from his master for in 1485 he signed a miniature in a manuscript of the poems of Mir Ali Shir prepared for Sultan Husain Mirza's son, Prince Badi' uz-Zaman. This miniature is very much in the manner of Bihzad and it is possible that the miniature "Iskandar enthroned" (plate 10) comes from his hand. If the picture is rather loosely constructed, the figures of Iskandar, the dervish and the bearded attendant are rendered with Bihzad's characteristic realism.

Sultan Husain Mirza died in 1506 leaving his inheritance to his two sons jointly. Within a year they had fallen before the onslaught of Shaibani Khan. A new order was arising in Persia; in the west Shah Isma'il had swept away the Turkman and in 1510 turned his attention to Khurasan. At the battle of Merv he decisively defeated the Uzbeks and despatched the skull of Shaibani Khan to the Ottoman Sultan at Constantinople as a trophy of victory.

Timurid power was utterly effaced from Persia but the art of painting as it had developed at the various courts of the Timurid princes remained to inspire subsequent generations. Bihzad's pupils kept alive the master's tradition at the Shaibanid court at Bukhara and the Safavid court at Tabriz. It is more than likely that artists originally of Herat were taken from Tabriz to Constantinople by Selim the Grim after his victory in 1514 over the Persians at the battle of Chaldiran. Certainly Turkish miniaturists followed Persian models.

In the later years of Sultan Husain Mirza's reign, another descendant of Timur, Babur, set out on his victorious progress that led him to the throne of Delhi. It was his son Humayun who introduced Persian artists to his court at Delhi and so prompted the first beginnings of the Mughal school. Nor was it long before artists of Indian origin were absorbing the lessons of Bihzad.

Note on Plate 1

ISKANDAR VISITS A HERMIT

A page (folio 230) from a manuscript anthology copied by Muhammad Halva'i and Nasir for Jalal ud-Din Iskandar ibn Umar Shaikh in

A.H. 813–814: 1410–1411 A.D.

Size: 6 in. × $3\frac{7}{8}$ in.

British Museum (Add. 27,261)

Iskandar—the Persian rendering of Alexander the Great—was as much the subject of legend and romance in the Orient as in mediaeval Europe. The episode illustrated here is described in Nizami's Sharaf Nameh. Iskandar's armies were vainly engaged in storming a mountain fortress held by robbers and the monarch determined on visiting a hermit who dwelt in a cave in order to enlist his spiritual aid. "A servant preceded with a candle. Night beset the path with the perils that day brings to the robber."

Since the Persian painter required total visibility for his subject, he indicated night as here by a star-sprinkled sky. The variation of the tones adds to the loneliness of the rocky wilderness. This miniature illustrates how close was the relationship between picture, illumination and calligraphy. The blossoming tree and horse and groom are admirably adapted to the area formed by the encroaching text.

The miniatures of this manuscript are among the earliest illustrations to Nizami's poems. In style they are closely related to those of another manuscript anthology in the Gulbenkian Collection copied for Iskandar in 1410–1411 A.D. by Mahmud ibn Murtaza ul-Husaini. In 1405 the same scribe copied a Zafar Nameh at Shiraz. This is another reason to connect the two anthologies with Shiraz: although the miniatures were executed by Jalairid artists from Baghdad. Our manuscript contains exquisite marginal drawings—a type of decoration which occurs in a copy of the poems of Sultan Ahmad Jalair made in 1402–1403 and now in the Freer Gallery, Washington, but not in Shirazi manuscripts before Iskandar.

First published in mcmlviii by Faber and Faber Limited, 24 Russell Square, London, W.C. 1. Text pages printed in Great Britain by Mardon, Son and Hall, Limited, Bristol, 1. Colour blocks made and printed by Fine Art Engravers Limited, Esher. *All rights reserved.*

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